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MATERIAL

ELK ISLAND NATIONAL PARK

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## HOW YOU CAN LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PARK

To help you know the park better and obtain greater enjoyment from your visit, park naturalists offer conducted tours and nature talks illustrated with colored slides to explain the purpose and the natural phenomena of the park. The evening programs are presented in the bandshell near the beach. Self-guided nature trails are located at the golf course and at the north end of the recreation area. During the summer, a park information office is operated near the sports ground.

## SEASON

The Park is open throughout the year. However, the cabin concession, picnic areas, refreshment booth and golf course are open only from May 1 to September 30.

## LOCATION

Elk Island National Park is situated in the Aspen Parkland of Central Alberta, 25 miles east of Edmonton. The park's area of 75 square miles is surrounded with an 8-foot-high wire fence. The park is split by Highway 16 into two sections. Fifty-one square miles to the north are open for public use. In the 24 square miles to the south, the last herd of wood bison is preserved in a natural sanctuary, which is completely closed to the public.

## PURPOSE

Elk Island National Park is one of 19 National Parks that form a system extending from Mount Revelstoke in British Columbia to Terra Nova in Newfoundland. These parks have been established to preserve selected areas in their natural state for the benefit, education and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Elk Island National Park was established by the federal government in 1906 as a game preserve. Today the park preserves some of the Aspen Parkland that was once typical of Western Canada. Like all National Parks in Canada, it is administered by the National and Historic Parks Branch, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

## NATURAL FEATURES

The glaciers shaped Elk Island National Park's knob and kettle topography. The Beaver Hills (elevation 2475 feet above sea level) are the high lands in the park.

The park is full of small sloughs and lakes. Lake Astotin, near the north end, is the largest. It is generally 8 to 10 feet deep but with deeper holes, one which is 24 feet deep. The lake is 2½ miles long, 1½ miles wide. Being an eutrophic lake (a "good food" lake) vast amounts of vegetation, mostly algae, are produced. The shallow water allows light to penetrate to rooted plants at the bottom. The floating organisms, whose movements are more or less dependent on currents, are quite dense with algae "blooms". When ice becomes thick in the winter, decaying vegetation uses up the little oxygen that is left in the water. Fish do not survive without oxygen.

## HOW TO SEE THE INTERESTING FEATURES

The main road leaves Highway 16 and goes north to swing around Astotin Lake and out on the north side. A secondary fire road (Oster Trail) may be taken to the west boundary. In the early morning or late evening large animals may be seen along either of these roads.

The two nature trails, both about 1½ miles long, pass through several kinds of vegetation zones.

## PARK ADMINISTRATION

A resident superintendent is in charge of the park. Park wardens stationed in the five districts of the park are responsible for the protection of all natural features and for the safety and guidance of visitors. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police assists in the maintenance of law and order.

## GEOLOGICAL

The surface in the park is covered with glacial drift about 100 feet thick. There are no outcroppings of bed rock. The marshes, bogs, ponds and lakes lie in the depressions of glacial deposits. The last ice sheet retreated from here relatively recently—10,000 years ago.

## PLANT LIFE

Elk Island lies within the Aspen Parkland—Mixed Wood Forest Vegetation Zone of North America, between the Coniferous Forest Zone to the north and the Prairie Zone to the south. This parkland is a remnant of the once solid poplar that covered the area before the country was settled. The clearing of the land which the early settlers began is almost complete. In a few years, stands of poplar will no longer exist outside the park and Elk Island will remain as an Aspen Parkland island surrounded by bare land.

The trembling aspen, the dominant tree in this forest, controls by light and moisture the life that exists here.

About 240 species of plants grow in the park. There are still a few meadows left within the aspen forest. Here the ground squirrels (gophers) and other prairie rodents, together with the larger mammals (deer, elk and buffalo), may graze in the early morning and evening. Meadow flowers blanket the ground from late June to mid-August. Poplars are gradually extending into the meadows and eventually all will become forest.

The scattered clumps of white spruce and also black spruce bogs are remnants of earlier, colder times when the glaciers were nearer than they are today. On higher and better drained soil clumps of white paper birch grow well, remnants of the once abundant giants from which Indians used to make their canoes, dishes and clothing. The main shrub is the hazelnut. Prior to this area being fenced, enclosing large numbers of moose, the saskatoon, choke cherry and dogwood were common. These shrubs, the moose's main food, are now scarce in this park.

The small flowering plants are varied and attractive, but are becoming scarce outside the park boundaries. These include the marsh marigold, tiger lily, wild sarsaparilla and bed straw.



The plant life of the several bogs is unique and attractive. Sphagnum moss and labrador tea provide the basic vegetation with the cloudberry or baked apple berry being common. There are patches of lichen or caribou moss scattered throughout. Cotton grass, a sedge, may be seen here too.

Elk Island contains many ponds which have their own typical vegetation. This includes the small three-leaved minor duckweed with its short roots, the potamogetons that stick their flowering heads above the water. The water lily and calla lily are seen at their best in late June and early July. The blue-green algae is the main food producer for the myriads of insect larvae that live in the ponds.

## WILDLIFE

The varied vegetation in the park allows many kinds of animals to find a place to live. The ponds are the best place to see the many varieties of invertebrate life including several kinds of snails, leeches, bugs and the larvae of a great variety of insects. The small mammals include at least five kinds of mice, four kinds of squirrels, chipmunk, pocket gopher, woodchuck, muskrat, many beaver, skunk, two and possibly three kinds of weasels, coyote, snowshoe rabbit, porcupine, mule deer, Virginia white tail deer, elk, moose, plains buffalo and wood buffalo. This is the only herd of pure wood buffalo left in the world; it numbers less than 30 animals.

At the beaver pond near the north gate, a pair of beaver and their young may be observed working energetically. Animals wander freely in some areas so drive carefully. An exhibition herd of plains

① One of the natural meadows which provide fine grazing for buffalo near the Tawayik Lakes.

② Replica of the Ukrainian pioneer's home.



③ A yellow-shafted flicker.

④ A flying squirrel.

⑤ A pair of horned owls scrutinize an intruder.

⑥ The deer mouse, so named for its remarkable ears.

⑦ A Least flycatcher with its brood. These birds consume large numbers of flies and thus help to keep insect populations in the park at a tolerable level.

⑧ The nature trail crosses a bog at one point.

## CAMPING AND PICNICKING

At the present time, there is only one campground for both trailers and tents. It is located on the east side of Astotin Lake at Sandy Beach and provides kitchen shelters, stoves, wood, water and sanitary facilities. Camping fees are \$1.00 a day.

Two picnic areas are provided, one near Sandy Beach and the other on the southeast side of the lake near the boat launching site. These are provided with water, wood and closed fireplaces. Washroom facilities are located near the beach.

## ACCOMMODATION

There is a cabin concession containing 17 units which furnish accommodation to the public at reasonable rates. The cabins have all modern facilities for housekeeping. If desired, A small store supplies groceries and other essentials. There is a tearoom at the golf course clubhouse where meals are served.

The nearest town is Lamont, 6½ miles north of the beach, where gas and other essentials may be obtained. Sixteen miles north and west of the west gate is Fort Saskatchewan and Edmonton is 30 miles west.

## PREVENT FIRES

Campfires may be kindled only in fireplaces provided for this purpose, and must be completely extinguished before leaving the site. Fire permits must be obtained from district wardens for any open fires outside these fireplaces. Visitors observing an unattended fire should attempt to extinguish it if possible, and promptly report it to the nearest park warden.

## PETS

Dogs and cats may accompany visitors into the park. For the protection of park animals, dogs must be kept on a leash.

## MOTOR LICENCES

Visitors driving cars are required to obtain a park motor vehicle licence at the entrance, \$1.00 for the fiscal year or 25 cents per single trip.

## BOATS

Boats are permitted on all the lakes and sloughs. Motor boats are restricted to Astotin Lake. There is a main boat launching site on the southeast side of this lake with water ski ramps located on the lake proper. All boats must carry safety equipment and conform with Small Vessels Regulations issued by the Canada Department of Transport.

## PRESERVATION

National Parks are selected areas set apart as living natural history museums to preserve nature so that future generations may observe what we see today. For this reason, all birds, mammals, invertebrate animals, trees and rocks are to remain undisturbed. Even the wild flowers are not to be picked—leave them for others to enjoy. Feeding, touching, or molesting wild animals is not permitted. This is in the interests of the animals as well as the human who could receive serious injury.

Please help protect your park for future enjoyment. It is part of your national inheritance.

buffalo is kept in a fenced-off area near the south entrance.

There are 150 species of birds. Since the park is located near one of the main North American bird staging areas (Beaverhill Lake), the waterfowl and shorebird migrations in spring and fall provide remarkable spectacles.

The water birds include many red-necked grebes on Astotin Lake all summer and horned grebes on many small ponds. Gadwall, widgeon, white wing scoter and ruddy duck are all quite common. The red-tailed hawk is continually on the prowl for mice or small birds, even ducks. The ruffed grouse may be heard every morning and evening until near the end of June drumming on its private logs. The sora rail sings continually in the pond vegetation, but never shows itself. The spotted sandpiper nests in almost every clearing, together with the lesser yellowlegs. The black terns will try to drive you away from their nests in the slough grass. The mourning dove sends its mournful notes wavering over the woodlands. The great horned owl searches the underbrush for rodents to feed the ever-hungry young. There are seven kinds of woodpeckers, including the pileated and northern three-toed and four kinds of swallows. Mountain bluebirds live in woodpecker holes in rotten trees.

Formerly Astotin Lake contained jackfish, suckers and possibly trout. Today the only fish that can live in this oxygen depleted lake (depleted by the vast amount of decaying vegetation) is the little stickleback. This fish will even live in sewage lagoons.

## HOW TO REACH THE PARK

The main entrance to Elk Island National Park is located on Highway 16 and is 30 miles east of the Edmonton city limits. Astotin Lake is nine miles north of the entrance. Headquarters is on the west side of the lake, with the recreation area on the east side. The north entrance is located four miles south of the village of Lamont. The west entrance is two miles south and 14 miles east of Fort Saskatchewan.







The Sunset Cabins are located near Astotin Lake on a wooded ridge.

## HISTORY

Elk Island may have acquired its name as a combination of the two outstanding characteristics of the area—numerous elk and the 21 islands in Astotin Lake. Astotin is generally believed to be derived from a Cree expression defining a place where there are many islands but a Cree woman has suggested that the name means a woolen skull-cap like a toque. If this is correct, there may have been an island or other natural feature which resembled a toque so "astotin" would have been used by the Crees to identify and define the lake.

Originally, the Beaver Hills were occupied by the Sarnia Indians but in the 1800's a band of Cree known as the Beaver Hills or Upstream people invaded the area, driving the Sarnia out. The Beaver Hills people scattered when the buffalo disappeared from the plains, most of the band settling at Saddle Lake and other groups going to Hobbema, Alberta, and various points in Montana. What is now the park was included in a large Indian reserve lying between Fort Saskatchewan and Vegreville and later was exchanged by the Indians for the Saddle Lake Reserve under Treaty Six.

The park came into being as the result of the initiative of five Albertans who decided to preserve the last elk of the area by fencing-off a 16 sq.mi. wildlife preserve. These men were William A. D. Lees and F. A. Walker of Fort Saskatchewan; Johnson Cascadden and Ellsworth Simmons, two Agricola farmers; and W. H. Cooper of Edmonton. On March 28, 1906, the five conservationists entered into an agreement with the federal government to fence the preserve and have at least 20 elk protected in it.

The fence was hurriedly completed to hold 200 buffalo, which were shipped by train from Montana in June, 1907. Another shipment of 211 buffalo was received in September. These were the vanguard of a herd of about 600 buffalo which the federal government purchased from Michael Pablo, a Montana rancher, and planned to establish on a natural range at Wainwright, Alberta.

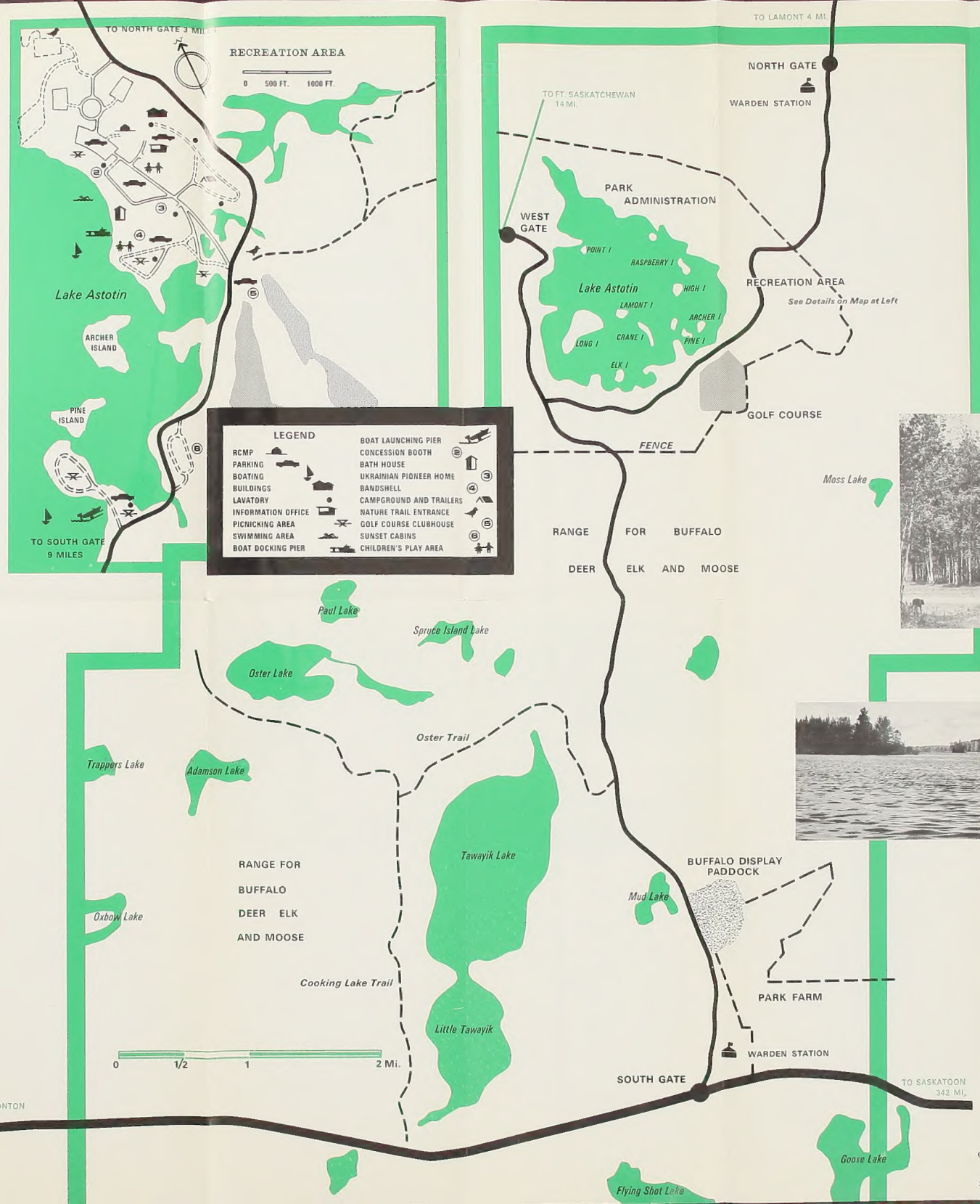
When the Wainwright park had been fenced, the buffalo were moved from Elk Island but about 35 eluded the round-up and remained in the park to become the ancestors of today's herd, which numbers about 600.

In 1913 Elk Island was established as a Dominion Park and became a National Park on the passing of the National Parks Act in 1930. In 1923, the homestead land of Charles Oster, 36 sections to the south of the original park area, was purchased by the federal government and added to the park. In 1947, another 24-square-mile area south of Highway 16 was added.

The first custodian of the original reserve was Mr. Simmons. In 1909 he was succeeded by Archie Coxford who served as park superintendent until 1936.

In 1951, an authentic replica of an Ukrainian thatched cottage was built in the park as a tribute to the settlers who founded the agricultural communities to the north and east of the Beaver Hills. This cottage is furnished in the style of the early Ukrainian homes on the prairies and contains typical examples of clothing and utensils either made by the early settlers or brought with them from the Ukraine.

Single copies of this publication may be obtained at Elk Island National Park or from the Director, National and Historic Parks Branch, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa.



Buffalo cross park roads outside the park recreation area so drive with care.



Astotin Lake and some of its many islands.



Issued under the authority of the  
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Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

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